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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5513

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

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PARTIAL TRANSCRIPTION - ORIGINAL FOLLOWS

3. (C) ASIDE FROM THE AUGUST 5 EXPLOSION, KABUL HAS REMAINED RELATIVELY (PERHAPS DECEPTIVELY) QUIET. THERE HAVE BEEN NO FURTHER SIGNIFICANT OUTBURSTS IN THE COUNTRY'S CAPITAL SINCE THE VIOLENT MUTINY IN BALA HISSAR ON AUGUST 5, ALTHOUGH SHOOTING IS OFTEN HEARD DURING THE NIGHTTIME CURFEW HOURS, AND THE SIGHT OF PATROLLING HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS HAS BECOME COMMONPLACE. KABUL IS AFGHANISTAN'S POLITICAL BRASS [ILLEG], OF COURSE, AND THE CITY IS HEAVILY GARRISONED WITH [ILLEG] FORCES AND OTHER SPECIALLY TRAINED UNITS. THUS, THE REGIME WILL PROBABLY DO EVERYTHING IN ITS POWER TO HOLD THIS CITY -- A DOUBLE-EDGED THOUGHT TO MANY OF THE CAPITAL'S RESIDENTS -- AND WE ESTIMATE THAT THE ABILITY TO MOUNT ANY DIRECT ASSAULT ON THE GOVERNMENT'S FORCES [5 WORDS ILLEG] THE REBEL'S CAPACITY. NONETHELESS, [ILLEG] HAVE TAKEN PLACE

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SUBJECT: (LOU) CURRENT STATUS OF THE INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN

1. (LOU) INTRODUCTORY NOTE: IN THE JUDGMENT OF THIS EMBASSY, THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT CAN BE USED TO BRIEF MEMBERS OF THE CONGRESS, SELECTED MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES (NO ATTRIBUTION SHOULD BE MADE TO USG SOURCES, HOWEVER), AND OFFICIALS OF FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS. THE OVERALL CLASSIFICATION OF THIS REPORT HAS BEEN KEPT AT CONFIDENTIAL SHOULD SOME WASHINGTON AGENCY PREFER THAT CERTAIN MATERIAL BE WITHHELD AT THIS TIME. END OF INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

2. (C) SUMMARY: THE MONTH OF AUGUST CAME IN WITH THE EXPLOSION IN KABUL ON THE FIFTH AND CLOSED WITH FIGHTING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE CONTINUING TO BUBBLE ALONG. THE REGIME SUFFERED NO DIRECT DEFEATS AT THE HANDS OF THE INSURGENTS, EVEN THOUGH THE GOVERNMENT GARRISON AT A TOWN IN THE KONAR VALLEY GAVE UP THE FIGHT AFTER WEEKS OF ENCIRCLEMENT BY THE REBELS. THE INSURGENTS' EFFORTS REMAIN UNCOORDINATED, AND THE DRA LEADERSHIP (WHETHER JUSTIFIED OR NOT) APPEARS SUFFICIENTLY CONFIDENT REGARDING THE COUNTRY'S SECURITY THAT PRESIDENT TARAKI, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SHAH WALI, AND A LARGE ENTOURAGE ARE ATTENDING THE KAN SUMMIT IN HAVANA. THE REMAINING FEW MONTHS BEFORE THE ONSET OF AFGHANISTAN'S WARM WINTER COULD PROVE CRUCIAL FOR THE DOMESTIC STRUGGLE, BUT, FOR THE MOMENT, AT LEAST, THIS REVOLUTIONARY REGIME REMAINS FAR FROM BEING OVERTHROWN BY THE DIRECT EFFORTS OF THE STILL FRAGMENTED OPPOSITION. END OF SUMMARY.

3. (C) ASIDE FROM THE AUGUST 5 EXPLOSION, KABUL HAS REMAINED RELATIVELY (PERHAPS DECEPTIVELY) QUIET. THERE HAVE BEEN NO FURTHER SIGNIFICANT OUTBURSTS IN THE COUNTRY'S CAPITAL SINCE THE VIOLENT MUTINY IN BALA HISSAR ON AUGUST 5, ALTHOUGH
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SHOOTING IS OFTEN HEARD DURING THE NIGHTTIME CURFED HOURS, AND THE SIGHT OF PATROLLING HELICOPTER SQUADS HAS BECOME COMMONPLACE. KABUL IS AFGHANISTAN'S POLITICAL HEART, OF COURSE, AND THE CITY IS HEAVILY GARRISONED WITH ARMY FORCES AND OTHER SPECIALLY TRAINED UNITS. THERE, THE REGIME WILL PROBABLY DO EVERYTHING IN ITS POWER TO HOLD THIS CITY -- A DOUBLE-EDGED THOUGHT TO MANY OF THE CAPITAL'S RESIDENTS -- AND BE ESTIMATE THAT THE ABILITY TO HOLD THE CITY IS AN ASSAULT ON THE GOVERNMENT'S TOLERANCE TO EXISTENCE OF THE REBELS' CAPACITY. NONETHELESS, THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT

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NOT ALL THAT FAR FROM THE CITY'S ENVIRONS -- FOR EXAMPLE, WESTERN TRUCKDRIVERS CAME UPON A FIRE-FIGHT INVOLVING TANKS AND ARTILLERY ABOUT 15 MILES SOUTH OF KABUL -- AND INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF TERRORISM OR HARASSING PROBES INTO THE CAPITAL COULD WELL PROVE EFFECTIVE IN INCREASING PRESSURE ON THE DRA LEADERSHIP. IN CONTRAST TO OTHER MAJOR HIGHWAYS, HOWEVER, SECURITY ALONG THE KABUL-TORKHAM HIGHWAY HAS NOT DETERIORATED (FOR EXAMPLE, BUS SERVICE BETWEEN PESHAWAR AND KABUL REMAINS NORMAL).

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4. (C) THE REGIME SUFFERS A SETBACK IN THE KONAR VALLEY. LATE IN THE MONTH, THE GOVERNMENT'S GARRISON AT [ILLEG] LOCATED ABOUT HALFWAY UP THE KONAR VALLEY, FOLLOWING WEEKS OF BEING

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4. (C) THE REGIME SUFFERS A SETBACK IN THE KORAN VALLEY.

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LATE IN THE NIGHT, THE GOVERNMENT'S GARRISON AT ASHAR, LOCATED
ABOUT HALFWAY UP THE KORAN VALLEY, FOLLOWING NEWS OF BEING

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VIRTUALLY SURROUNDED BY THE INSURGENTS, ABANDONED THE FIGHT AFTER HAVING ELIMINATED ITS FEW STAUNCHLY PRO-REGIME MEMBERS. ALTHOUGH THE LOSS OF THE TOWN, EVEN IF TEMPORARY, AND ITS GARRISON AND EQUIPMENT REPRESENTS A REVERSAL OF THE GOVERNMENT'S FORTUNES IN THIS REGION, ASMAR'S "FALL" WAS NOT DIRECTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE EFFORTS OF THE INSURGENTS, AND, THEREFORE, DOES NOT NECESSARILY CONSTITUTE A DEFEAT OF DRA ARMS IN A FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTER WITH THE REBELS. NONETHELESS, THE DEFECTION OF THE GARRISON IS THE LATEST CRACK IN THE OVERALL MORALE OF THE REGIME'S MILITARY FORCES, AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FACTOR IN ASSESSING THE STAYING POWER OF THIS REVOLUTIONARY KHALQI GOVERNMENT.

5. (C) PAKTIA AND THE SOUTH CONTINUE TO SIMMER. ALTHOUGH NO LARGE TOWNS IN PAKTIA HAVE YET FALLEN TO THE REBELS, SEVERAL, INCLUDING THE TOWN OF KHOST, ARE SURROUNDED BY THE INSURGENTS AND ARE DEPENDENT UPON AIR RESUPPLY. THE FOCUS OF MILITARY ACTIVITY IN THIS REGION HAS APPARENTLY SHIFTED TO THE CITIES OF GARDEZ AND GHAZNI WHICH, DESPITE WIDESPREAD RUMORS TO THE CONTRARY, REMAIN IN GOVERNMENT HANDS. FIGHTING AROUND THESE TWO POPULATION CENTERS OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS HAS BEEN RELATIVELY HEAVY, HOWEVER, AND THE REGIME HAS APPARENTLY EMPLOYED EXTENSIVE USE OF AIR POWER. KABUL RESIDENTS WITNESS ALMOST DAILY FLIGHTS OF JET FIGHTERS AND HELICOPTER GUNSHIPS HEADING SOUTH OVER THE CAPITAL, PRESUMABLY FOR TARGETS AROUND GARDEZ AND GHAZNI. THE ROAD FROM KABUL TO KANDAHAR (WHICH PASSES THROUGH GHAZNI) HAS BECOME A VERY HAZARDOUS ROUTE. REBELS NOW SEEM ABLE TO SET UP ROADBLOCKS AT WILL ALONG THIS HIGHWAY AS THEY STOP VEHICLES IN SEARCH OF KHALQIS OR OTHER GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS. ONE SUCH INCIDENT ENDED TRAGICALLY, AS THE KHALQIS ON AT LEAST ONE

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BUS LOADED WITH CIVILIANS CHOSE TO FIGHT, RATHER THAN TRUST THEIR FATE TO THE INSURGENTS, AND IN THE ENSUING SHOOTOUT SCORES OF WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND OTHER INNOCENT TRAVELERS WERE KILLED.

6. (LOU) KANDAHAR ITSELF REMAINS TENSE, AS SPORADIC SHOOTING, ESPECIALLY AT NIGHT, HAS BEEN REPORTED BY VARIOUS TRAVELERS. ACCORDING TO SOME REPORTS, THIS PARTICULAR VIOLENCE HAS BEEN DIRECTED AT INDIVIDUAL KHALQIS IN KANDAHAR, AND HAS NOT YET GROWN INTO A DIRECT MILITARY THREAT TO THE REGIME'S POSITION IN THE COUNTRY'S SECOND-LARGEST CITY. REPORTS THAT UP TO

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THIRTY SOVIETS WERE KILLED IN KANDAHAR HAVE NOT BEEN CONFIRMED. THE KANDAHAR-HERAT ROAD HAS BECOME VIRTUALLY A "FOOL'S HIGHWAY," SINCE ANYONE WHO UNDERTAKES THAT PARTICULAR JOURNEY IS MOST UNWISE. SEVERAL INCIDENTS ALONG THAT ROAD HAVE INVOLVED FOREIGNERS -- FORTUNATELY NO AMERICANS AS YET -- AND A DUTCH COUPLE ABDUCTED AT A REBEL ROADBLOCK WEEKS AGO HAS NOT YET TURNED UP. ONE CARLOAD OF ITALIAN TOURISTS REPORTEDLY WERE TAKEN BY THE REBELS FROM THE MAIN HIGHWAY DIRECTLY WEST ACROSS THE DASHT-I-MARGO ("DESERT OF DEATH") TO IRAN WHERE THE HAPLESS TRAVELERS WERE RELEASED TO IRANIAN AUTHORITIES, ONLY TO BE INCARCERATED FOR HAVING ENTERED IRAN "ILLEGALLY."

7. (LOU) FIGHTING IN THE NORTH IS MARKED BY CUTTING OF THE SALANG PASS ROAD. TWO REINFORCED CONCRETE SPANS ON THE SOUTHERN APPROACHES TO THE CRITICAL SALANG PASS WERE DROPPED BY INSURGENT ACTION DURING THE MONTH, THEREBY CAUSING TRANSPORTATION HEADACHES FOR THE REGIME, BUT ALSO INDICATING A GROWING MILITARY SOPHISTICATION ON THE PART OF THE ANTI-REGIME FORCES

(#)

REQUIRED AN EXPERTISE IN DEMOLITIONS
WHICH PROBABLY SURPASSED THE SKILL NORMALLY ASSOCIATED WITH
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MOUNTAIN VILLAGERS. RECENT TRAVELERS REPORT, HOWEVER, THAT THESE BRIDGES ARE UNDER REPAIR, AND THAT THE SITUATION AROUND THE SALANG IS RELATIVELY CALM. THE RUGGED AND SPARSELY POPULATED PANJSHIR VALLEY A FEW MILES EAST OF THE SALANG PASS ALSO ERUPTED IN VIOLENCE DURING AUGUST, BUT THE REGIME APPARENTLY HAS CONTENTED ITSELF WITH PUNITIVE AIR STRIKES AGAINST THE VALLEY'S INHABITANTS, AS WELL AS WITH A BLOCKADE AT THE VALLEY'S MOUTH IN ORDER TO PREVENT ANY INSURGENT ACTION AGAINST THE NEARBY BAGRAM AIR BASE, THE MOST VITAL MILITARY AIR FIELD IN THE COUNTRY.

NOTE BY OC/T: SECTION 2 OF 2 KABL 66971 (#) COMMISSION PARA. 7.
CORRECTION TO FOLLOW.

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8. ACTION IN THE CENTER OF THE COUNTRY IS HIGHLIGHTED BY DARK REPORTS OF ATROCITIES. THERE HAVE BEEN A [2 WORDS ILLEG] OF REPORTS THAT VIOLENCE IN THE CENTRAL PART OF THE COUNTRY

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INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

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CINCPAC: ALSO FOR POLAD

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KARACHI: FOR RSS

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8. (C) ACTION IN THE CENTER OF THE COUNTRY IS HIGHLIGHTED BY
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DARK REPORTS OF ATROCITIES. THERE HAVE BEEN A SEVERAL NUMBER
OF REPORTS THAT VIOLENCE IN THE CENTRAL PART OF THE COUNTRY

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HAS DETERIORATED INTO A VICIOUS ROUND OF GOVERNMENT INSTIGATED ATROCITIES INCLUDING MASS RAPES, AIMED PRINCIPALLY AT THE HAZARA ETHNIC GROUP WHO ARE NON-PUSHTUN AND SHI'A. THE HAZARAS FOR CENTURIES HAVE OCCUPIED THE LOWEST RUNG ON AFGHANISTAN'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LADDER, AND IT IS, THEREFORE, NOT UNEXPECTED THAT THE WRATH OF A DESPOTIC REGIME, ESPECIALLY IN THE FORM OF A RELATIVELY UNDISCIPLINED AND FRUSTRATED ARMY, COULD BE TURNED AGAINST THIS PARTICULAR SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION WHOSE LOYALTY MIGHT BE QUESTIONED BY THE DRA LEADERSHIP. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE OPPOSITION IS ACTIVE IN THE HAZARA POPULATED REGIONS, AND A NUMBER OF UNCONFIRMED REPORTS OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS CONTEND THAT THE TOWN BAMBIYAN -- THE COUNTRY'S MOST IMPORTANT TOURIST ATTRACTION BEFORE THE "TROUBLES" -- HAS BEEN TAKEN BY HAZARA INSURGENTS. ASIDE FROM ETHNIC FRICTIONS, ONE FACTOR ABOUT THE HAZARA INSURGENCY THAT COULD ANGER THE REGIME TO A MURDEROUS LEVEL IS THAT THERE IS VIRTUALLY NO CREDIBLE WAY "FOREIGN INTERVENTIONISTS" CAN BE BLAMED FOR STIRRING UP ANTI-REGIME ACTIVITY IN THE REMOTE AND VIRTUALLY INACCESSIBLE CENTRAL PART OF THE COUNTRY. TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, THE OPPOSITION EFFORTS IN THE HAZARAJAT ARE COMPLETELY INDIGENOUS AND HAVE NOT ENJOYED THE LUXURY OF SOME SORT OF "SAFEHAVEN" ACROSS ANY BORDER. THUS, THE HAZARA OPPOSITION, PERHAPS UNFORTUNATELY FOR THAT GROUP'S OWN WELFARE, DOES NOT FIT THE REGIME'S PROPAGANDA MOLD, A DISFUNCTION WHICH, COUPLED WITH RACIAL HATREDS, MAKES VICIOUS RETALIATION BY THE GOVERNMENT PROBABLY A TRAGIC REALITY.

9. (C) CONCLUSIONS. THE INSURGENCY IS CLEARLY STILL BUBBLING ALONG IN MUCH OF THE COUNTRYSIDE, DESPITE THE REBELS' FAILURE TO INFLICT ANY SIGNIFICANT DIRECT DEFEAT ON GOVERNMENT FORCES -- THE FALL OF ASMAR NOTWITHSTANDING. THIS TYPE OF CONFLICT,

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HOWEVER, CONCEIVABLY CAN CONTINUE FOR MONTHS AND YEARS (WITHOUT ANY CLEARCUT WATERSHED) BEFORE ONE SIDE EMERGES "VICTORIOUS." AS WE HAVE STATED PREVIOUSLY, THE EVENTUAL WINNER IN AFGHANISTAN WILL PROBABLY BE THE SIDE WHICH AVOIDS LOSING, RATHER THAN THE ONE WHICH ACTUALLY TRIES TO CARRY THE DAY DECISIVELY.

10. (C) DESPITE THE DEVELOPMENTS RECOUNTED ABOVE, THE OVERTHROW OF THIS KHALQI REGIME IS STILL NOT INEVITABLE, NOR IS IT NECESSARILY EVEN PROBABLE; THERE REMAINS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY COORDINATION OF REBEL EFFORTS, NOR ANY INDICATION THAT

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THE DISPARATE GROUPS OPERATING WITHIN THE COUNTRY ARE DIRECTLY FIGHTING FOR ANYTHING MORE THAN THE EVICTION OF THE GOVERNMENT FROM THEIR LOCAL TURF. LIKEWISE, THERE HAVE BEEN NO SERIOUS CHALLENGES TO THE REGIME'S CONTROL IN KABUL OR IN THE OTHER MAJOR CITIES WHICH THE KHALQIS HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO COUNTER WITHIN A MATTER OF HOURS (AS ON AUGUST 5 IN KABUL) OR OF SEVERAL DAYS (AS IN HERAT IN MARCH).

11. (C) THE ATTITUDE OF THE REGIME APPEARS TO BE ONE OF CONFIDENCE, ALBEIT PERHAPS NOT SERENITY; WHETHER MISPLACED OR NOT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. IN THIS REGARD, PRESIDENT TARAKI, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SHAH WALI (PROBABLY THE THIRD-RANKING POLITICIAN IN THE COUNTRY), AND A LARGE ENTOURAGE ARE AT THE MOMENT IN HAVANA AT THE NAM SUMMIT, THEREBY OUTWARDLY REFLECTING A CERTAIN ASSUREDNESS THAT THE FATE OF THE DRA IS NOT IMMINENTLY THREATENED.

12. WHETHER TIME IS ON THE SIDE OF THE REGIME OR THE INSURGENTS IS A MATTER FOR SERIOUS DEBATE, AS IS THE QUESTION OF WHICH SIDE THE LOOMING WINTER WILL AFFECT MORE ADVERSELY. SOME OBSERVERS CLAIM THAT THE INSURGENTS SIMPLY MUST PREVAIL BEFORE THE SNOWS COME OR THEY WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO REGROUP NEXT SPRING AND AGAIN POSE A THREAT TO THE KHALQIS. WHILE WE AGREE THIS THESIS IS OPEN TO QUESTION, WE DO BELIEVE THAT THE NEXT TWO OR THREE MONTHS COULD BE CRUCIAL FOR THE DO-
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MESTIC STRUGGLE, AND, FURTHERMORE, THAT THE REGIME AS OF NOW IS FAR FROM BEING OVERTHROWN BY THE DIRECT EFFORTS OF THE STILL UNCOORDINATED REBELS.
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